

UNTOLD

STORY LEADS FROM MONTANA



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Hands of Harvest: Arts & Crafts Hit the Road

Eternal optimists live in Northcentral Montana, and have recently pulled themselves up by their collective cowboy bootstraps to organize the area into cultural loop tours for visitors.

Dubbed Hands of Harvest, the unique project has brought together more than 100 rural residents as volunteers, all of them committed to an old-fashioned grassroots campaign designed to bring visitors down Montana's roads less traveled.

Hands of Harvest relies on joint partnerships and collective efforts to create, market, and distribute Montana crafts and services. The organizers and volunteers behind the program want to live in and create sustainable communities, celebrate their cultural heritage, and steward their cultural landscape. They've already published and begun distributing a brochure; next up is a guidebook that will spotlight the treasures in their own backyard.

The idea of building an alternative economy through cultural tourism is based on a model proved successful by North Carolina's Handmade in America, which also focuses on artists and creators of fine crafts and other businesses and events unique to corridors. Hands of Harvest, headed by a steering committee, has created criteria for inclusion much like Handmade.

There are five corridors, which take visitors clear across the varied landscape of Northcentral Montana. Near Montana's northern border, visitors can follow the "Hi-Line" history of the rails (Great Northern Trail), or travel west to the majesty of East Glacier Park (Foothills Trail). The loops head south through the beauty of the Rocky Mountain Front (Peaks and Prairies), the Sun River Valley (Three Rivers Country) and back through Great Falls to Lewis and Clark's route along the Missouri (Cottonwood Country). Spectacular and varied landscapes let visitors see why Charlie Russell and other famous Montana artists have found inspiration from the power of these places.

Hands of Harvest reflects Montana art at a deep, intrinsic level. Unexpectedly and delightfully, this project hasn't just connected towns and highways; it's also developed deep connections between the landscape and the creators in the Hands of Harvest territory. The people behind the project don't just have tenuous ties to the land; instead, the connection is so deep

that people are willing to stake their lives and livelihoods upon it. Each time a seed is planted, a calf is born, a raindrop falls, sweetgrass is braided and smoked, Hands of Harvest inspires another destination.

There is an unspoken, accepted respect for the land. It is understood that the residents here are stewards. They see and feel the continuity of their work—not just between seasons, but between generations. It is this connection to the land that makes the hearts of the residents beat and the Hands of Harvest sow.

Hands of Harvest, linking together communities along cultural corridors in North-central Montana, is in Russell Country. All trailheads start in the city of Great Falls, served by Great Falls International Airport. For more information on Hands of Harvest, visit handsofharvest.org, or e-mail vwarp@montana.com. For statewide accommodations and general travel information, log onto www.visitmt.com.



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Half Moon Ranch Cattle Drive Creates Partners. (Or is that Pardners?)

Twice a year, the Nelson family, owners of the Half Moon Ranch in central Montana, round up 500-1,000 cattle and herd them between wintering grounds on the plains and summer pastures in the Snowy Mountains. And, twice a year, the Nelson family brings along plenty of help: vacationers who want to participate in an authentic Montana cattle drive.

"Every year we would take our cattle from our Twin Coulee Ranch where they winter, into summer pasture in the Snowy Mountains," says Art Nelson. "So I decided, why not have some guests to share the experience?" Sound like the movie *City Slickers*? In many ways, it is: whether participants choose the Spring or Fall Drive, they participate in an actual, six-day, 30-mile roundup of cattle. Before they begin, guests attend riding seminars; along the way, they ride in wagons, cook over campfires, and sort and place cattle.

But the goals and beginnings of the Half Moon Ranch Cattle Drive run much deeper than mere vacationing. In 1999, the Nelson family wanted to be able to communicate



Half Moon Ranch cattle drive.

with "non-ag" people, letting them know the values and lifestyle of ranching. They felt the public had a lot to learn from them, and they, in turn, needed to communicate with people outside ranching circles. "As farmers and ranchers, we talk among ourselves all of the time," comments Art, himself a third-generation cattle rancher. "But we don't communicate our lifestyle to the general public. One way we can break the barrier between ag and non-ag folks is to educate the public." And so, the idea for the cattle drive was born as a bridge between the ag and non-ag communities.

Staying true to that vision of communication and partnership, the Nelsons teamed up with the Montana Farm Bureau to get the cattle drive up and running. Bureau staff handle the administration, such as answering phones, mailing information packets, taking

reservations and maintaining a website. In return, the Nelson family donates a large portion of the proceeds to the Bureau's Young Farmer and Rancher (YF&R) program. Tourists get a unique vacation; the Nelsons get help with their roundups; young people get additional resources for farming and ranching education.

It's the classic "everybody wins" scenario.

"Not only is our cattle drive a great time, offering beautiful scenery, wonderful food and amazing camaraderie, but it's a way to help young people in agriculture," concludes Nelson. "Everyone needs to understand that if agricultural producers don't survive, nobody will. It's so important to keep young people involved and give them the tools they need to stay in agriculture."

The Half Moon Ranch Cattle Drive originates in Central Montana's Snowy Mountains. Guests who sign up for the cattle drive can fly into nearby Billings Logan International Airport in Billings. For details go to www.cattledrivemontana.com, or contact Diana at the Montana Farm Bureau office: 406-587-3153 or dianaa@mfbf.org. For a complete listing of Montana cattle drives, log onto www.visitmt.com.

Tizer Lake Gardens Take Visitors to Other Places. Like Tibet.

In 1998, Belva Lotzer and Dick Krott bought three acres of land in the shadow of the Elkhorn Mountains. To control the spread of noxious weeds, they planted large swaths of cosmos, poppies and other wild flowers. "The first year we planted about 1200 sq.ft of glorious cosmos," recalls Belva. "People traveling up our road would stop and take pictures. Then they started coming back with Aunt Suzie and Grandma, and eventually we were overwhelmed with visitors."

And so, along with those seeds, an idea was planted: an idea that has since blossomed into Tizer Gardens, featuring thousands of flowering plants, seven separate themed gardens and trails, an event center (courtesy of a restored gold mining homestead), and unique offerings such as back massages.

Suffice to say, Dick and Belva have much more than mere weed control on their minds these days.



Tizer Lake Gardens

They've opened a nursery and garden shop at the gardens, where visitors can buy everything from books to bird seed to ornaments. They host weddings and other special gatherings. They create unique, interesting events such as "High Tea in the Gardens" for people who like their tea with a nice floral bouquet, or relaxing massages in the garden for complete rest and relaxation.

And then, there are the gardens themselves, filled with all kinds of surprises. "Because we're at 5,000 feet," says Dick, "visitors are often shocked that we can grow hundreds of kinds of flowering plants." And grow them they do, in seven fascinating gardens. Dick and Belva have planted species from around the world, some as far away as Tibet. The Rose Garden, Herb Patch, and Nature Trail are traditional favorites, but a few new twists are thrown in, as well. For history buffs, the Lewis

A Dam Good Museum at Fort Peck

It was one of the first Montana stops for Lewis and Clark on their "Corps of Discovery." Now, 200 years later, it just might be the first stop for many visitors to Big Sky Country. It's Fort Peck, site of the new \$6.7 million Fort Peck Dam Interpretive Center and Museum that's set to open on a partial basis this spring. The Interpretive Center, backed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, offers a look at the birth and history of the Fort Peck Dam, which was authorized by FDR in 1933. The museum, meanwhile, will offer displays devoted to fossils, dam construction, Eastern Montana history, Native American culture, homesteaders, and Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (just a few miles away).



Museum Drafts

And while the entire project won't finish until 2005 (just in time for the bicentennial commemoration of Lewis & Clark's journey), many displays and attractions are ready to go for this spring's opening. For instance, in the lobby, visitors will be treated to a life size T-rex model. The display, visible from outside through the center's giant walls of glass, depicts the leading theories on how this dinosaur looked and stood. Nearby, two large aquariums will showcase native and game fish of the area with information panels on each species.

In addition, the main museum area is partially completed: workers are putting the finishing touches on the wildlife diorama

displaying animals presently found on the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, as well as a cast of the Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton discovered here, affectionately known as "Peck's Rex."

The Center will also have a multipurpose room available beginning this spring. Here visitors can view videos on the construction of Fort Peck Dam, wildlife, and other topics. This room will also be used for demonstrations, classes, interpretive programs, and public meetings.

When completed in 2005, additional displays at the museum will include Fort Peck Dam construction history, recreation opportunities on Fort Peck Reservoir and on the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, boomtowns of the area, and eventually a children's area.

The Fort Peck Dam Interpretive Center and Museum is located near the town of Fort Peck immediately downstream of Fort Peck Dam. It is within walking distance from Kiwanis Park Day Use Area and the Downstream Campground.

Fort Peck is located in northeast Montana's Missouri River Country. Both Great Falls and Billings have international airport service. Check out www.missouririvervisitmt.com to explore this area online.



Calamity Jane Lives on in Livingston

She was a scout for the United States Army in the late 19th century. Depending on which stories you believe, she may have also been a sharpshooter, Pony Express rider, nurse, gambler, prostitute, and gold prospector. But no one can deny Calamity Jane was the most famous woman of the American West. Known to have a penchant for tall tales (perhaps because she was a contemporary of other famous Western showmen such as "Wild Bill" Hickock and "Buffalo Bill" Cody), Calamity chose Livingston, Montana as her home from 1884 until her death. During that time, she regaled many with tales of her exploits.

One hundred years after her death, her home town of Livingston is giving her the square deal she deserved. In fact, to observe the centennial of her death, her adopted hometown is bringing her back in style, with shows and events to commemorate the life of the most famous woman in the American West. The Calamity Jane Centennial Celebration in Livingston will kick off June 26 and 27, 2004 with a Wild West Show, a hoe-down and dozens of activities culminating in the famous Livingston Rodeo parade and rodeo on July 2. It will be a weekend and days of gun fighting exhibitions, history, parades and live performances by Calamity Jane herself: from June 1 to October, she'll perform six days a week at the renovated Moose Lodge and the Calamity Jane Dinner Theater.

The modern incarnation of Calamity Jane is actually actress Dianne Gleason (dubbed "The #1 Calamity Jane Living History Actress"), who presents a one-woman show detailing histories of the region, life and adventures of 19th Century America in "The Life and Times of Calamity Jane."

And so, 100 years after her death, the legend of Calamity Jane lives on in Livingston.

Livingston, Montana is located in Southcentral Montana's Yellowstone Country, north of Yellowstone National Park on Interstate 90. The closest airport is in Bozeman, about 30 miles west. For more information on the Calamity Jane Show, visit www.calamityjane1only.com. For accommodations and other information go to www.yellowstone.visitmt.com.

*Dianne Gleason as Calamity Jane.
Courtesy www.calamityjane1only.com*

Sea Kayaking (No Sea Needed)

Northwest Montana is famous for Glacier National Park, along with a long list of outdoor pursuits such as downhill skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, golf, fishing and more. Now, it just might be time to add another activity to that list: sea kayaking. Of course, one might suppose having an actual sea would be a prerequisite for sea kayaking. But in an area filled with so many large, uncrowded lakes, worthy water is hardly a problem.

"Sea kayaks are the perfect vessels for exploring the big, cold, scenic lakes in Northwest Montana," says Shawn Baker, a sea kayaking instructor (and kayak builder) based in Whitefish. "Flathead Lake is a prime example. (Because of its size) Flathead's winds, changing weather conditions, scenery, sweeping vistas, and interesting shorelines are similar to an ocean's."

And while Flathead Lake is the Big Daddy of sea kayaking in Northwest Montana, it's hardly the only lake getting attention. The lakes of Glacier National



Kayaker on Lake Mary Ronan

Park, including Kintla, Bowman, St. Mary and Lake McDonald, get rave reviews.

"The greatest place to kayak, in terms of scenery, is Glacier National Park," says Baker. Hungry Horse Reservoir, not far from the park, is a large body to challenge the stamina. The area also offers Whitefish Lake, Tally Lake, the Thompson chain of lakes near Eureka and the numerous lakes of the Seeley-Swan Valley...this is inland country that's built for sea kayaks.

And why, specifically, are sea kayaks

so popular? Shawn Baker thinks it has something to do with that innate sense of exploration. "Many people have a desire to explore in human-powered vehicles," he says. "Canoes are great for rivers, but poor vessels to explore open water conditions. Dories and rowboats are more difficult for a single person to transport and are often slower. Rowing shells are a poor choice where frequent wind-driven chop is encountered. Kayaks were developed in the Arctic to transport hunters across long stretches of cold water. We've got plenty of that."

All of which helps to explain why Northwest Montana has one more item to add to its long list of outdoor pursuits.

Glacier Country, which includes Glacier National Park, Flathead Lakes, and several other popular sea kayaking destinations, is Northwest Montana's travel region. It is served by two national airports in Missoula and Kalispell. For a complete list of kayaking opportunities, go to www.visitmt.com and search for kayaking.

Tizer Lake Gardens continued...

and Clark Native Plant Trail is a step back to the Corps of Discovery's heyday 200 years ago. The Children's Garden has interesting plants and activities designed to involve kids in gardening. The Old Time Vegetable Garden features fresh-grown foods ready for the dinner table, while the Patriotic Garden, as you might imagine, is bursting with reds, whites and blues.

Trails wind their way through all the gardens, along the way crossing Prickly Pear Creek on numerous foot bridges (including two small islands), and passing extensive perennial beds, shade gardens, begonia beds, Montana's largest Clematis collection, and even stations for watching birds and butterflies.

The future holds even more. Dick and Belya built a greenhouse this year, and are working toward making Tizer Lake Gardens the first and only botanic garden in Montana, which involves extensive cataloging.

And to think it all started with a bit of weed control.

Tizer Lake Gardens are located near Jefferson City in Gold West Country, Montana's Southwest tourism region. Jefferson City is on I-15 between Butte and Helena (both with airports).

FROM MONTANA

The diversity of events, places and people in Montana is almost as wide as the state itself. We hope to give you a taste of that diversity with this quarterly newsletter. In addition, the following services are offered to editors, writers and producers:

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